A

SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

Pariſh Church of St. Lawrence Jewry,

ON SUNDAY, THE TENTH OF JANUARY, 1796.

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SERMON

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PREACHED IN THE

Pariſh Church of St. Lawrence Jewry,

BEFORE THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE THE LORD MAYOR,

THE

SHERIFFS,

AND THE

COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LONDON,

ON SUNDAY, THE TENTH OF JANUARY, 1796,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED

FOR ADMINISTERING THE HOLY COMMUNION

TO THE

MEMBERS OF THE CORPORATION.

BY THE REVD THOMAS ROBERTS, A. M.

CHAPLAIN TO HIS LORDSHIP.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY W. WILSON, ST. PETER'S-HILL, DOCTORS'-COMMONS.

MDCCXCVI.

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LONDON:

CURTIS, MAYOR.

A Common Council holden in the Chamber of the Guildhall of the City of London, on Thurſday the 14th Day of January, 1796.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY,

THAT the Thanks of this Court be given to the Reverend Mr. ROBERTS, Chaplain to the Right Honourable the LORD-MAYOR, for his excellent Sermon preached at the *Pariſh Church* of *St. Lawrence Jewry*, before the LORD-MAYOR, ALDERMEN, SHERIFFS, and ſeveral of the MEMBERS of this COURT, on *Sunday* the *Tenth* of this *Month*, and that he be requeſted to print the ſame, and ſend a Copy thereof to every MEMBER of this COURT.

RIX.

TO THE

Right Honourable WILLIAM CURTIS,

LORD MAYOR,

THE

WORSHIPFUL THE ALDERMEN,

THE

RECORDER, THE SHERIFFS,

AND THE

COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LONDON,

THIS

SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

Pariſh Church of St. Lawrence Jewry,

ON SUNDAY, THE TENTH OF JANUARY, 1796,

AND PRINTED AT THEIR REQUEST,

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY THEIR OBEDIENT SERVANT,

LONDON,
FEB. 7, 1795.

THE AUTHOR.

PSALM L. VERSE FOURTEENTH.

OFFER UNTO GOD THANKSGIVING, AND PAY THY VOWS UNTO THE MOST HIGH.

IN this Pſalm, we have a magnificent and ſublime deſcription of the glorious majeſty of God. The mighty God ſends forth a ſolemn ſummons to his people the Jews, to attend and hear the declaration of his purpoſe to aboliſh the ceremonial and typical worſhip; and, in its room, to eſtabliſh one more ſpiritual, refined, and perfect. God, indeed, always required and regarded a ſpiritual worſhip, proceeding from the heart; but yet as he is ſaid to have "winked at "the times of ignorance in the Gentiles," ſo did he make paternal allowances for the groſsneſs of the Jews in their conſtant and uniform attachment to external and ſenſible objects.

Our Lord informs us what indulgence was granted to them in the matter of divorce, by reaſon of the hardneſs of their hearts; and from the ſame indulgence to the weakneſs of their faith, we muſt attribute ſuch a multitude of legal ſervices, ſacrifices, waſhings, and oblations. We are told by the Apoſtle, "that ſuch made not the comers thereunto "perfect;"* but that all the virtue conſiſted in that repreſentative relation they had to a more ſpiritual and enlightened worſhip: They aſſiſted faith by a viſible repreſentation: Their waſhing from bodily filth denoted that a pure God required inward holineſs and ſanctity of heart; and their ſacrifices were to teach them to look to the Meſſiah, that great ſacrifice, "who, after he had offered one ſacrifice for "ſins, for ever ſat down on the right hand of God."†

This great error, or obſtinate blindneſs of the Jews, in contemplating the exterior only, and embracing the "ſhadow "inſtead of the very image" and ſubſtance, is reproved by God himſelf in this Pſalm: Their ſupreme Ruler and heavenly Father expoſtulates with them in the form of a judicial proceſs.—The Almighty Judge of heaven is repreſented iſſuing his ſolemn orders—"Our God ſhall come and ſhall "not

* Hebrews x. 1. † Hebrews x. 12.

" not keep ſilence; a fire ſhall devour before him, and it " ſhall be very tempeſtuous round about him:" The witneſſes are cited to appear—" He ſhall call to the heavens from " above, and to the earth that he may judge his people:" The perſons accuſed are next produced—" Hear, O my " people, and I will ſpeak; O Iſrael, and I will teſtify " againſt thee: I am God, even thy God." He demonſtrates to them the vanity and emptineſs of their external ſacrifices, declaring—" The world, to be his and the fulneſs thereof." God, laſtly, informs them what he expected and required—" Offer unto God thankſgiving, and pay thy vows unto the " Moſt High."

Let us conſider the ſame words addreſſed to us, a Chriſtian congregation, and we ſhall find in them pious directions in our ſincere preparation for, and our ſpiritual participation of, the holy ſacrament. They contain, and enjoin two important and eſſential duties,

Firſt, To render unto God the juſt tribute of a thankful heart—" offer unto God thankſgiving."

Secondly, To prove our ſincerity and faith—" pay thy vows " unto the Moſt High."

The firſt duty is, to " offer unto God thankſgiving." It muſt be unequivocally acknowledged that it is the foundation of true juſtice and equity, that every one ſhould receive his due; if, therefore, we with-hold that thankfulneſs which is confeſſedly due to God, and which his repeated mercies ſo conſtantly and decidedly claim, we leſſen his merits, and deny his right.

The virtue of gratitude has invariably appeared ſo reaſonable, ſalutary, and important, that not only the Chriſtian religion enjoins it as a poſitive duty, but all the ancient philoſophers and lawgivers eſtabliſhed it as a firſt and ruling principle. Ingratitude to God or man is evidently contrary to that natural law interwoven in the hearts and conſciences of human creatures, whereby the Apoſtle ſays, " they are " a law unto themſelves."* There is no dictate, nor precept, of that natural law plainer than this, that we ought to be thankful to thoſe who promote and advance our good, and to make the beſt and ſincereſt return in our power. It appears, that from this innate perſuaſion, and natural dictate, thoſe which are (uſually and properly) called the firſt principles of nature are derived—that God, who created and governs

* Romans ii. 14.

verns the world, is to be worſhiped — that parents, who gave us life, and afford us protection, are to be honoured. Hence ariſe, as flowing from a pure ſpring, the firſt principles and genuine ſource of all reaſoning on moral truths.

What the dictates of natural religion enforce, divine revelation invariably confirms. The duty of thankſgiving was one principal end and deſign of the inſtitution of the Lord's day, the Chriſtian ſabbath, to be a day of gladneſs, and thankful rejoicing for the finiſhing the great work of our redemption by the reſurrection of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.

The end and deſign of the firſt inſtitution of the ſabbath, obſerved by Adam, Noah, and their poſterity, till the time of Moſes, was to commemorate the creation of the world, and to celebrate the wiſdom, power, and goodneſs of God, manifeſted therein; but there was another reaſon after that period peculiar to the Iſraelites, they were to obſerve the ſabbath, in remembrance of their miraculous deliverance from Egyptian bondage, for Moſes expreſsly ſays, " the Lord " thy God commanded thee to ſanctify the ſabbath day."

Hence

Hence we may learn, that the re-inſtitution of the ſabbath, in the time of Moſes, was a day of reſt, to commemorate the eminent diſplay of the glory and goodneſs of God to the children of Iſrael, affording them opportunity of rendering thankſgiving and praiſe to him for thoſe recent and extraordinary manifeſtations of his mercy and deliverance.

But this duty is ſtill more apparent in the inſtitution of the Chriſtian ſabbath, or the Lord's day, as it is emphatically ca'led, in which the alteration of the day, the change from the laſt day of the week to the firſt, manifeſtly declares the end of that inſtitution to be for the thankful remembrance of the reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt from the dead, and the glorious conſequences thereof, the evidence of our juſtification and reconciliation with God, as the Apoſtle expreſſes it — "Chriſt was raiſed for our juſtification."*

Again, "to offer unto God thankſgiving," is rendered more eſſential and obligatory on us as a ſolemn act and duty of the Chriſtian religion; and that the moſt rational, pleaſing, and beneficial of all religious inſtitutions. The Lord's Supper is the moſt ſolemn and efficacious rite of our holy

* Romans iv. 25.

holy religion; and it was expreſsly inſtituted—'for a thankful remembrance of the death of Chriſt, and of the benefits 'we receive thereby.' The words of our bleſſed Lord at his laſt ſupper were—"do this in remembrance of me; and the Apoſtle calls it "the cup of bleſſing which we bleſs;"* and afterwards intimates, that as "often as ye eat this bread, "and drink this cup, ye do ſhew the Lord's death till he "come."† The very act of celebration, in imitation of our Saviour's example, who himſelf gave thanks before he took the bread, was always accompanied with ſolemn praiſes and thankſgiving, from which it formerly received a diſtinguiſhing and characteriſtic name, the Lord's Supper, being uſually called, by the primitive Chriſtians, the Euchariſt, *i. e.* thankſgiving. This declares the excellence of this pleaſing duty of thankfulneſs, ſince the moſt holy and ſublime rite of the Chriſtian religion was deſigned to promote it, to excite our gratitude, and fill us with a joyful, and thankful ſenſe, of the mercy of God, through the merits of Jeſus Chriſt.

Having thus conſidered, that thankſgiving is due to God from principles of reaſon, natural religion, and divine revelation,

* 1 Corinthians x. 16. † 1 Corinthians xi. 26.

velation, I will proceed to the next enjoined duty—" pay " thy vows unto the Moſt High."

Under the Jewiſh diſpenſation we frequently read of extraordinary ſacrifices, to which they bound themſelves by a vow, and were called free-will offerings, becauſe the law did not neceſſarily require their performance; ſuch were not commanded by the injunction in the text, becauſe thoſe were partly ceremonial; or had legal ſacrifices been enjoined, it would have been in contradiction to what preceded. When God charged his people " to pay their vows unto him," he meant that they ſhould renew their covenant with him, and diſcharge in future the duties and obligations of it more faithfully: A covenant then implies a vow, and the parties covenanting do mutually engage themſelves to each other. The meaning of God's covenant with his people is clearly and ſatisfactorily explained in Exodus—" If ye will obey my voice, and keep my " covenant, then ye ſhall be a peculiar treaſure unto me " above all people, for all the earth is mine."* And we find the people's conſent to that covenant—" all the people " anſwered together, and ſaid, all that the Lord hath ſpoken " we will do."† In Deuteronomy, Moſes declares—" this " day

* Exodus xix. ver. 5. † Exodus xix. ver. 8.

" day the Lord hath commanded thee to do theſe ſtatutes " and judgments; thou ſhalt therefore keep and do them, " with all thy heart and with all thy ſoul."* The duties and obligations of this covenant were ſpiritual, and a ſincere and internal obedience was required.

The ſame divine command equally obliges us under the Chriſtian diſpenſation. The covenant comprehended the performance of every moral duty, and required a ſpiritual and pure worſhip; the ſum of which was, to love God with all the heart, with all the ſoul, and to keep his commandments. This of courſe was not aboliſhed by Jeſus Chriſt, for he expreſsly declares—" he came not to deſtroy, but to fulfil."

To enter into covenant with God is a Chriſtian duty, becauſe it is clearly ordered by the Goſpel: " This is the co- " venant I will make with the houſe of Iſrael after thoſe days, " ſaith the Lord, I will put my laws in their mind, and " write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, " and they ſhall be to me a people."† The Apoſtle evidently alludes to the Goſpel diſpenſation, which brings us under a ſolemn vow, ſacred promiſe, and faithful covenant with God.

* Deut. xi. 13—32. † Hebrews viii. 10.

This ſolemn vow, ſacred promiſe, and faithful covenant, has been made and entered into with God, by our early admiſſion into the church of Chriſt by baptiſm: In that ſacred and initiatory rite, "we die unto ſin"—devote ourſelves to God—and through faith believe his ſacred promiſes.

The office of the Church calls it 'a ſolemn vow, promiſe, 'and profeſſion' then made: We profeſſed ourſelves to be the faithful ſervants of God, and the true diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt; we promiſed to obey his will, and keep his commandments; we vowed a perpetual enmity and oppoſition to the allurements of the world, and the cunning and devices of Satan. Thus having entered into covenant with God by baptiſm, our Saviour enjoins it to be confirmed and renewed in the other ſacrament of the Church—'for a continual re-'membrance of his death, and of the benefits which we 'receive thereby.'

In order to prove this, we muſt conſider that all thoſe who attend this ſacred ordinance are ſuch who have previouſly devoted themſelves to God and Chriſt—became branches from the root—and thereby a ſpiritual contract and union has been eſtabliſhed. This contract is more poſitively con-

firmed

firmed and ratified in the Lord's Supper; becauſe, in receiving the Holy Communion, there is a mutual act of giving and receiving, 'a pledge;' thereby ſolemnly declaring, that we bind ourſelves more ſincerely in that ſacred covenant. In a contract about worldly matters, the giving and receiving ſome token, or pledge, before witneſſes, is conſidered as a confirmation of a bargain, and binding to the reſpective parties. Much more this ſolemn giving and receiving of bread and wine, the inſtitution of Chriſt himſelf, is a ſacred teſt of our faith and obedience; in other words, this ſacrament is the ſpiritual and actual bond of the New Teſtament or covenant, whereby we become one with Chriſt, and he with us; he that receives it, by that act, affixes his ſeal, and enters into the moſt ſacred obligation to perform the requiſite and enjoined duties.

The celebration of the Holy Sacrament evidently appears to be of poſitive inſtitution and of divine appointment; but that it ſhould be required as a teſt to be received by officers civil and military, according to the Church of England, has been matter of ſerious argument and public controverſy. Candid allowance, and Chriſtian forbearance, ought to be paid to the genuine and ſincere dictates of conſcience; all agree in opinion that the duty is of divine appointment,

the laſt dying command of our Redeemer; but ſome differ in its political application. It muſt be however confeſſed by all, that the truly good man, the ſincere advocate and practiſer of the Chriſtian religion, its moral duties, and its ſacred rites and ceremonies, is moſt likely to be the beſt member of civil ſociety. The man who publickly evinces the purity of his principles, by performing his vows and ſacred obligations in the ſight of God and man—the man who acts from true faith and firm conviction of the certainty of divine revelation —the man who confirms, by his religious deportment, the firſt principles of reaſon and natural religion, (that gratitude and obedience to God, and our parents, are incumbent and immutable duties)—the man, who faithfully examines his conduct, and who ſincerely celebrates and partakes of that ſacred rite, the Lord's Supper, " in remembrance of his Divine Maſter" —the man who thus acts, I ſhould hope, can offer no violence to his feeling and conſcience, by uniting in one comprehenſive act of gratitude and obedience to God, compliance with human inſtitutions, and protection to uniformity in religious opinion.

When we approach God's holy table, and become partakers of that heavenly feaſt, we profeſs ourſelves to be of his family,

family, to become his friends and followers, and to be truly faithful to our benefactor, and heavenly Maſter. He that is not faithful and true to him whoſe bread he eats muſt, in a worldly ſenſe, be conſidered as a deceitful enemy. Judas dipped his hand in the diſh, and then betrayed his Maſter. In the language of Holy Scripture, the eating of bread together is conſidered as a token of friendſhip and agreement. We read in Job "they that had been of his acquaint-"ance before, and did eat bread with him in his houſe; they "bemoaned and comforted him."*—We are alſo informed, that covenants were made by eating of bread together, as between Jacob and Laban; "Let us make a covenant, and "Jacob ſaid, gather ſtones and they did eat there upon the "heap."† Again, "Jacob offered ſacrifice upon the Mount, "and called his brethren to eat bread, and they did eat bread, "and tarried all night in the mount‡." In this inſtance we may learn, that a ſacred and ſolemn rite accompanied a private and civil agreement, as a teſt of compliance and obedience: "See, (ſays Laban) God is a witneſs betwixt me and thee."‖

We

* Job xlii. 11.
† Gen. xxxi. 54.
‡ Gen. xxxi. 46.
‖ Gen. xxxi. 50.

We may further obſerve, that the word ſacrament doth properly ſignify an oath, ſuch an one as ſoldiers uſed to take to their general, to be true and faithful unto him, to lay down their lives for his ſake, and never to forſake him. The ſame obligation attends us to the Lord's Table, where we enter into covenant with the captain of our ſalvation, we renew our engagement of ſervice and fidelity to him: In the ſacrament of baptiſm we promiſed to be faithful to Chriſt, to fight under his banner againſt ſin, the world, and the devil; in the ſacrament of the Lord's Supper we ſtrengthen, and refreſh our ſouls by the body and blood of Chriſt, for our ſpiritual warfare; we renew our covenant; confirm our obedience; put on the whole armour of God; and ſwear allegiance to our heavenly king and commander.

The religion of Chriſt no where preſcribes any particular form of government, but invariably recommends obedience to thoſe already eſtabliſhed. Our Saviour, on a certain occaſion ſays, "Render therefore unto Cæſar the things which "are Cæſar's, and unto God the things that are God's:* And St. Paul, "Render therefore to all their dues; tribute "to whom tribute is due; cuſtom to whom cuſtom; fear "to

* St. Matthew xxii. 21.

" to whom fear; honour to whom honour."* It may, therefore be preſumed that the act, or rite, of the Chriſtian religion, which from its name ſacrament implies an oath of allegiance to our heavenly King, will not ſuffer pollution or profanation from its application to promote the bond of peace, and protect religious principle.

Whenever we approach that Holy Table, to receive the bread and wine, we commemorate the death of Chriſt; we pay the debt of gratitude, and acknowledge we are under the moſt ſolemn engagements. The inſtitution of it was not merely for the uſe of his followers and diſciples; all who profeſſed to be members of his body were " to do this in remembrance of " him;" he declares, " where two or three are gathered toge- " ther, he is in the midſt of them;" and promiſes his preſence continually—" lo! I am with you alway, even unto the " end of the world."†

To celebrate this outward action of communion with Chriſt, and refuſe him the ſovereignty over our hearts, is to deny him and deceive ourſelves. The true communicant carries with him a ſincere and contrite heart; he waſhes his hands in innocency, " and

* Romans xiii. 7. † St. Matthew xx. 28.

and purifies his thoughts; he owns himſelf, with pious dignity, the diſciple of a crucified Saviour; he prepares himſelf to commemorate the death and paſſion of his redeemer; he acknowledges Jeſus Chriſt his heavenly Maſter and ſpiritual King; he profeſſes, by this action, that the love of his Saviour is ſuperior to every thing the world can afford; he counts all things loſs, if he can gain Chriſt; he pledges himſelf to enliſt under his ſacred banner, to defend his religion, promote his cauſe, and imitate his bleſſed example—the true communicant confirms and ratifies this "as often as he eats of "that bread, and drinks of that cup."

Having thus conſidered in what reſpect and by what method we can "offer unto God thankſgiving, and pay our vows unto "the Moſt High," by fulfilling our Chriſtian duties, and particularly in the celebration of the Lord's Supper; let us therefore remove every impediment, and purify our hearts from envy, malice, diſcontent, intemperance, profaneneſs, and infidelity; and when the ſoil is clear, the virtues of faith, ſanctity, purity, content, forgiveneſs, and charity, will take root, and, through the mercy and protection of God, branch out into everlaſting life.

Let

Let us finally remember, that a proper ſenſe and ſincere acknowledgment of the numberleſs favours received from the goodneſs of Almighty God will, in the firſt place, produce the genuine fruit of thankſgiving; but to prove that our thankſgiving is grafted on true ſincerity, we muſt have recourſe to active piety, and "pay our vows unto the Moſt High."

If we praiſe our bleſſed Lord and Maſter for his great condeſcenſion and humility, let us zealouſly copy ſo bright an example; if we thank him for his infinite mercy and compaſſion to us, let us be tender and forgiving, kind and charitable to each other; if we admire him in his acts of love and charity to the wants of others, let us diſtribute our favours with chearfulneſs, ſupply the wants of others from our abundance, and relieve the diſtreſſed with alacrity: If we adore him for his obedience and reſignation, "let our example ſo ſhine before "men, that they may ſee our good works, and glorify our "Father which is in Heaven." Theſe virtues will be the criterion by which we may judge of the ſincerity of our thankfulneſs and obedience, becauſe what we truly thank we praiſe —what we unfeignedly praiſe we admire—and what we ſincerely admire we wiſh to imitate.

Let us endeavour to make ſome return, by our gratitude to God, for his many and repeated bleſſings vouchſafed to us; and, with the holy Angels who ſtand about the Throne, join in ſaying, " bleſſing and glory, wiſdom and thankſgiving, " honour, and power and might, be unto our God, for ever " and ever. AMEN.

FINIS.